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ABSTRACT

This unit on sex-role development was designed for use with individuals who work with young children. The objectives for the unit are stated in behavioral terms and the content to be taught comprises the major portion of the unit. Specific areas covered in the content section include: (1) definitions of terms, (2) theories of sex-role development, (3) factors influencing sex-role development in children, (4) ways in which stereotypes limit children's development, (5) changing social conditions and (6) ways adults can assist children in their sex-role development. A few suggested activities, review questions and answers, and a brief bibliography are also included. (JMB)

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A Unit On Sex-Role Development for Those Working with Young Children

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OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, the student should be able to:

- Define sex typing, sex-role stereotypes, and androgyny.
- Explain four theories of sex-role development.
- Describe four major influences on the sex-role development of children.
- List three ways in which sex-role stereotypes can limit the child's total development.
- Discuss three social conditions which have changed traditional ideas of "masculine" and "feminine".
- Describe ways the adult can assist children in their sex-role development.

The sex-role development of children is closely tied to their feelings about self. It is important that those working with young children have a clear understanding of what is involved in this process. A thorough knowledge of the development of sex roles makes adults aware of those sex-role influences they have upon the child. This knowledge can be used by workers to assist the child in the sex-role process. A basic understanding of this process alerts the adult to ways of making it a successful experience.

THE SEX-TYPING PROCESS

The development of sex roles occurs through a process called <u>sex typing</u>. This is the process by which adults help children acquire an understanding of their masculine or feminine sex role. At an early age children are provided toys and props. This prac-

tice begins to sex type them as either male or female. Sex typing is how males become masculine and females feminine. This process is important because it gives children a clear understanding of who they are. It also gives them ways of behaving which are considered acceptable by others.

THEORIES OF SEX-ROLE DEVELOPMENT

There are four major theories which account for sex typing in young children. They are Freudian Theory, Learning Theory, Power Theory, and Cognitive Theory. All of these theories have been thoroughly researched. The majority of studies show that there is some truth to each theory.

Freudian Theory

Freudian Theory says that a boy identifies with the father out of fear and self-protection. This happens because the father is so threatening and powerful. The female child is said to fear losing her mother's love. To avoid this loss, she identifies with her mother.

Learning Theory

Learning Theory claims that identification with the father or mother is dependent upon a rewarding, affectionate relationship between parent and child. As a result of this rewarding relationship, the child identifies with the appropriate parent. This theory is especially important to teachers. They, too, can be rewarding, affectionate sex-role models for children.

Power Theory

The Power Theory holds that children identify with and adopt the role of the most powerful parent. Children identify with the powerful parent because they are dependent upon the parent for their resources

such as food, clothing, and shelter. Children wish to gain control of resources too. Therefore they rehearse or copy the behavior of the powerful parent.

Cognitive Theory

Cognitive Theory says that sex-role development is related to the intellectual growth of the child. As the child's intellectual ability grows better, the ability to distinguish sex roles is improved. According to this theory, children choose what is appropriate for their sex role and learn to identify with it. Teachers can help children to know their sex role. They can also teach children that it is all right for little boys to play with dolls. This may help make boys better fathers. It is also all right for little girls to play with the doctor's set instead of the nurse's set. When children have opportunities to try out different roles, they can best learn their own role.

INFLUENCES ON SEX-ROLE DEVELOPMENT

Sex-role development is not a simple process. It occurs not because of one factor. It is the result of a combination of many influences upon the life of the child. Maccoby and Jacklin have summarized the major research studies on sex typing. They note that sex typing is the result of a combination of four major influences. These influences are biological factors, social conditioning, imitation of the same-sex adult, and self-socialization. As a result of these four factors, behavioral differences between males and females may be observed early in life.

Biological Factors

At birth children have biological traits which make them clearly either male or female. The female has ovaries, while the male has testes. The female has internal genital structures while the male has external genitalia. The normal female has two X chromosomes in each cell of her body. The normal male has one X and one Y chromosome in each cell. As hormones are produced in the developing child, androgen is produced in males and estrogen in females. Androgen helps in the physical masculinization of boys. It may even contribute to rough or aggressive activity which is often associated with boys. The female hormone, estrogen, has a feminizing effect on the body.

Although children are biologically male or female, their sex-role identity is not inborn. It is believed that children, regardless of sex, are more alike than different at birth. A state of sexual neutrality is said to exist. Maccoby and Jacklin believe that it is the powerful influences in the social environment which play up or play down the biology of the developing child. These environmental influences are social conditioning, imitation, and self-socialization.

Social Conditioning

The child's biological sex determines how adults react towards the child. The labeling of the infant as "masculine" or "feminine" sometimes begins before birth. Active fetuses are rumored to be male while the less active ones are thought to be female. Before birth, parents sometimes begin the imagined sexual identity. The child's room is often decorated, and toys and clothes purchased with the aid of this mental image. Rheingold and Cook have studied the rooms of a number of infants. They found that the contents of the rooms reflect the sex-typing beha-

viors of the parents. Boys are provided with toys that encourage interests outside the home. For example, they are given transportation toys, sports equipment, machines, and military armament. Girls, however, are given toys which promote activities centered in the home. Examples are baby dolls, cooking stove, tea set, and baby carriage.

As a result of adult behavior, children are conditioned to behave in certain ways. Conditioning refers to rewarding certain behaviors. These behaviors are strengthened and repeated as a result of the reward. After years of being reinforced for certain behaviors, children become conditioned into either a masculine or feminine role.

Boys and girls receive reinforcement throughout the early years for behaving in a certain way. The appropriateness of their behavior depends on society's definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity". Through reinforcement, parents convey to the child what they consider to be appropriate sex-role behaviors. This is accomplished by the name given the child, by the toys bought for the child, by the way in which the child is dressed, the kinds of games encouraged, and the approval or disapproval of certain behaviors. Rewards for certain sex-role behaviors increase the strength of those behaviors. Reinforcement causes the child to repeat those behaviors which are rewarded.

Just as a boy is reinforced for behaving in masculine ways, he is punished for showing female traits. Girls have more sex-role freedom than do boys. They are allowed to be feminine but can also behave as boys at times without threat of punishment.

Imitation

The third factor which influences sex-role development is imitation. Imitation is the learning of one's sex role by observing and copying the behaviors of a model. Children imitate behaviors of the same-sex adult models around them. Exposure to male models increases the likelihood of masculine behaviors in boys. The observation of female models results in feminine behaviors in girls. In a desire to be masculine, a boy imitates a masculine model. This imitation includes mannerisms, habits, values, interests, and so forth. The girl, in her imitation of the mother, will assume many of those same qualities of the mother.

Self-Socialization

According to psychologist, Lawrence Kohlberg, one's sexual identity parallels cognitive growth. It develops and changes throughout the life span. As children mature in cognitive development, they become aware of how a male or female is "supposed" to behave. Once they understand what is appropriate behavior for their sex, children learn the appropriate sex role and identify with it. This process is called Self-Socialization. The child's idea of what is acceptable behavior for males and females varies. It depends upon what males and females do and whether the behaviors are approved or disapproved by others. Sex-role behavior depends upon that to which the child is exposed. Thus, sex-role behaviors are different from culture to culture.

As a result of these four factors, the sex-role identity of the child develops. Experts say that by age five, the sex-role preferences of boys and girls are firmly set. Further learning of the child's sex role is strengthened by the roles set forth by society in general. Sex typing in the later years is reinforced by important individuals in the child's life, such as

teachers and peers. The research of Fagot and Patterson shows that peer influence has a powerful influence on sex-role behaviors. They observed that female teachers gave their nursery school children the greatest rewards for feminine behaviors. Peer reinforcement, however, was strong enough to counteract this. The male children continued to engage in masculine behaviors because they reinforced one another for male-related activities.

CROSS-CULTURAL DEFINITIONS OF "MASCULINE" AND "FEMININE"

It is difficult to define what is meant by "masculine" and "feminine". The definitions of these terms vary from one culture to another. A relationship exists between the values and needs of a culture and its sex-role expectations. Generally, a society will define masculinity and femininity in terms of those qualities and behaviors that it considers important for its maintenance.

In some societies it is unmanly to cry or show emotion. This is because crying is associated with weakness, typically a feminine trait. In other societies it is unwomanly to be assertive and to compete. This is because these behaviors have been characteristic of males. In many European societies men openly embrace, sit close together, and show affection for one another. In other countries like the United States, It is not typical for men to openly display affection for one another. Even occupations are sex typed. Most of the weavers among the Navaho Indians are female. In the neighboring Hopis, men do the weaving. In India it is not unusual to see a great many women working on construction sites. In Russia, most of the medical doctors are women.

Sex-Role Stereotypes

Definitions of "masculine" and "feminine" depend upon the culture.

It is, therefore, important that children learn what role behaviors are acceptable in their own society. The socialization of the child in this respect is important for personality adjustment. However, when the concepts of "masculine" and "feminine" are too rigidly defined or become outdated, sex-role stereotyping occurs. Sex-role stereotypes are defined as the rigid expectations or beliefs of sex-role behaviors. These beliefs restrict the child's total development. These attitudes are often traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity which have become outdated by societal standards.

Traditionally, in our society, boys have been reinforced for being assertive, independent, aggressive, and even emotionally detached. Girls have been reinforced for adopting a more passive, emotional, and dependent role. Caregiver to the young, cook, and housekeeper are examples of roles assigned to women in the United States.

In a study by Williams and Bennett subjects were asked to choose sex-role stereotypes from a list. Of the stereotypes chosen, those describing males were these:

adventurous	tough	loud	disorderly
coarse	rational	independent	cruel
daring	unexcitable	forceful	courageous
unemotional	stable	dominant	boastful

Some of the stereotypes from this same study describing females were as follows:

charming	dreamy	fickle	fussy
complaining	emotional	flirtatious	high-strung
dependent	excitable	frivolous	nagging

prudish	sentimental	talkative
rattlebrained	submissive	whiny

Sex-Role Stereotypes Limit People

Some of these stereotypes are behaviors which both boys and girls need to incorporate into their personalities. The pressure for boys to be "masculine" and girls to be "feminine" are sometimes very strong. When this happens, boys and girls become trapped into their sex roles. Sex-role stereotypes may restrict the total development of the child in a number of ways.

Sex-role stereotypes limit the range of behaviors available to both boys and girls. When boys are told, "Big boys don't cry", they are conditioned to suppress natural and healthy emotional outlets. Sometimes girls are instructed to remain quiet, neat, and pretty. Often they miss out on experiences which would widen and enrich their lives. The development of assertiveness, competition, and independence in girls has its advantages. The development of sensitivity, nurturance, and interest in domestic affairs in boys has advantages too.

Sex-role stereotypes do not equip boys and girls for changing adult roles. For example, they limit the recreational life style and the career possibilities open to a child. As a result, when children grow up they may be faced with obsolete ways of coping in a modern world.

Sex-role stereotypes restrict the amount of personal fulfillment each child is allowed and they can create mental stress. In such cases, the child's sex-role gender functions as a prison. Creativity, talents, and human potential may become stifled.

Freedom to be one's own unique blend of temperaments and behavior

allows all children to be more complete. The opening of choices to children will allow them to discover the potential which lies within them. It will allow them to become fully-functioning human beings.

CHANGES IN SEX-ROLE DEFINITIONS

Traditional Definitions

Early in the development of our culture, it was necessary to rear males and females differently. Females were to behave in one way and males to behave in another. Sex roles were assigned in relation to economic needs which were necessary for survival. In our historical development, a division of labor existed. Men had to fend off the enemy, to hunt for food, and build living structures. They had to be rugged, tough, and aggressive. Women had to care for the young, cook the meals, and perform other domestic activities. Each sex was dependent upon the other for survival.

Androgyny

Our modern society, no longer requires rigid sex-role division for survival. Many basic needs are now cared for outside the home. As the needs and values of a society change, the sex-role behaviors of its males and females also change. Our society is redefining its concepts of "masculine" and "feminine". As it does so, more equal role assignments are allowed for men and women. Behaviors which were once allowed only for one sex or the other are now acceptable for both. We are moving more toward a state of androgyny. Androgyny is the blending of both masculine and feminine traits into one personality. The research of Dr. Sandra Bem indicates that androgynous individuals are better prepared to cope in today's world. Androgynous people can behave in ways that are not stereo-

typed. Androgynous children can cope more effectively with diverse situations in life. Research on androgynous people supports the need for more flexible sex roles. It suggests that androgyny may be a more human standard of psychological health, compared to rigid sex typing.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS CAUSING CHANGES IN SEX ROLES

There are social conditions which have changed traditional ideas of "masculine" and "feminine". These are economic changes, views of personal fulfilment, and socialization practices.

Economic Changes

During World War II, while men were away at war, many women assumed jobs previously dominated by males. They became factory workers, truck drivers, and so forth. These changes in roles were essential to the survival of the economy. As males returned from armed services, a flooded job market resulted in more men sharing in domestic chores. In today's economy, many households find it necessary for both husband and wife to work. This is making it possible to maintain a more profitable standard of living. Along with an equalization of career roles, comes a sharing of the domestic responsibilities. In one-parent families where women are the sole "breadwinners", good paying jobs are essential. These are frequently the very jobs occupied by males. Thus, more women move into these traditionally male-dominated jobs for the rewards which are to be found there.

Views of Personal Fulfillment

Both males and females are assuming opposite sex roles for reasons of personal fulfillment. The woman searches for assertiveness, ability

to compete, and independence. It is no longer uncommon to encounter female policewomen, female doctors, or firewomen. Males, also, are interested in taking a greater part in the birth and care of children.

The LaMaze birth method is one example in which males participate in the birth process with their wives. Males also are beginning to accept careers in female-dominated fields for the personal satisfaction they receive there. Male caregivers, male nurses, male hairdressers, and househusbands are a few examples.

Socialization Practices

Socializing children to be exclusively feminine or masculine does not prepare them for sex-role expectations in today's world. It is becoming more acceptable for boys to play with dolls or play house. It is now more acceptable for girls to engage in active games and to compete with their male peers. Some believe that this prepares them to adapt to the roles of a competitive society.

ASSISTING CHILDREN IN SEX-ROLE DEVELOPMENT

Child care workers and parents play a very important role in the sex-role development of the child. There are at least six ways parents and teachers can assist children in their sex-role development.

Warm and Nurturant Relationships

Children acquire their sex-role identity best when parents are warm and nurturant rather than punitive. The adult's warm and rewarding attitude increases the child's desire to adopt the role of the same-sex parent.

Combining Affection and Dominance

Sex-role development is promoted when the adult combines affection with dominance. The sex typing of the child corresponds to the sex of

the parent who is a leader in the family. Children of both sexes usually imitate the dominant parent more than the passive parent. This is especially true for boys. When the father is dominant and affectionate, the son is higher in masculinity. Boys from female-dominant homes tend to be more passive. Girls also identify more strongly with mothers who are dominant and affectionate.

Providing Male and Female Models

The presence of both male and female models fosters sex-role development in the child. Children from father-absent or mother-absent homes, should be given exposure to sex role models in place of the missing parent. Substitute models help children by assisting them in distinguishing male roles from female roles. The presence of both female and male models helps children to learn appropriate sex-role behaviors. It also helps them to see role contrasts of the opposite sex. Schools for young children are dominated by females. It is therefore desirable to recruit males into the classroom setting. Until more men can be employed in early childhood education, Stiarra suggests bringing replacements into the classroom. There are a number of ways to do this. Examples are retired men, senior citizens, local military men, local businessmen, male relatives, school workmen, and students. Field trips to the places of employment of firemen, policemen, and other male-related occupations exposes children to men. When possible, it is helpful to have these men bring their tools of trade and visit the classroom.

Developing Both Masculine and Feminine Traits

Rather than being boxed into stereotyped sex roles, children should

be exposed to both masculine and feminine roles. They should be allowed to incorporate those masculine and feminine traits which make them whole, well-rounded human beings. For example, it is important for girls to develop some competitiveness and independence to cope in today's society. These are traditional "masculine" traits.

Boys need to learn to be sensitive to others and to express natural emotions. Modern society is also demanding that the male be able to cook and to help take care of the home. In the past we have labeled this as "feminine" behavior. Young children need some choice in trying out different roles. Child care workers can help children explore different roles. Boys can play in the housekeeping area and help make snacks. Girls can be allowed to play competitive games, do woodworking, or play with cars and trucks.

Accepting the Child's Biological Sex

Successful sex role development is closely tied to the feelings children have toward themselves. It is important that the child's biological sex be accepted. Within limits, choices should be given children as to which masculine and feminine traits develop. It is important that the adults in children's lives accept them for who they are. This acceptance builds self-esteem in the child. Generally, those children who acquire their sex roles easiest, have better self-concepts than those who experience difficulty.

Explanations to Questions Regarding Human Sexuality

Sometimes it is necessary for the teacher to provide facts regarding sex education. Children are curious. They ask questions in regard to parts of the body or bodily functions. Clear, honest explanations should

be given. The usage of correct terms for body parts or functions rather than slang words is also important. For example, a child may ask the age-old question of "Where do babies come from?" Responses such as "The stork delivers them." or "They are purchased at the hospital." are not true. Such answers only confuse children.

SUMMARY

Sex-role development is a complex process. It is closely related to a child's self-concept. Four theories attempt to explain how young children become sex typed as masculine or feminine. These theories are Freudian, Learning, Power, and Cognitive. Maccoby and Jacklin have summarized the research from these theories. They conclude that biological factors, social conditioning, imitation, and self-socialization best explain sex-role development.

Parents begin to sex type their child from the moment they know the sex. At first the only real differences in babies are in chromosomes, hormones, and genitalia. Parents begin to reward boys for boy behavior and girls for girl behavior. Later, children begin to think of themselves as boys or girls. A boy begins to behave as he thinks boys behave. A girl begins to behave as she thinks girls behave.

Sometimes behaviors expected for boys and girls become stereotyped. In our society, boys are supposed to be aggressive, and girls are supposed to be passive. These stereotypes limit behavior. Some people think that sex-role stereotypes are not useful today. They think boys should be encouraged to cook and play with dolls. This may begin to teach them to be better fathers. Girls will probably work outside the home when they are

grown. They should be prepared for roles other than mother and housekeeper.

Teachers can help children explore many occupational roles. They can allow boys to play in the housekeeping area and help to make snacks. They can allow girls to play ball and use hammers and screw drivers in the work shop area. Child care workers who help children explore many roles prepare children to be adults who behave effectively in many different situations.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Visit a school for young children. Look at the books and toys provided for the children in the classroom. Answer the following questions and report the findings to your class.
  - A. Do the books and toys limit the development of the child?
  - B. Do they provide for the child's exploration of a broad number of occupational roles?
  - C. In what ways do they allow for personal fulfillment for children in later life experiences?
- Talk to the parent of a young child about how boys behave differently from girls.
- Observe the behavior and activities of boys and girls on a playground. Describe how they are alike or different.

REVIEW

A. Define each of the following:

1. Sex typing
2. Sex-role stereotypes
3. Androgyny

B. The four theories of sex-role development are listed below. Identify each theory by matching the theory with the statement. Some theories may be used more than once.

a. Freudian Theory
b. Learning Theory
c. Power Theory
d. Cognitive Theory

_____1. Sex-role identification is dependent upon the intellectual development of the child.

_____2. Sex-role identification results from a rewarding, affectionate relationship between parent and child.

____3. The child identifies with the powerful parent.

____4. The child copies the behavior of the parent in order to gain control over the resources.

____5. The male child identifies with the father out of fear because the father is so threatening.

____6. The female child identifies with her mother for fear of losing her mother's love.

____7. The child is able to distinguish appropriate sex roles.

C. Identify the major influences on the sex-role development of children.

D. Describe three ways in which sex-role stereotypes can limit the child's total development.

E. Ideas of "masculine" and "feminine" have undergone change. Name three social conditions which account for this change.

F. List four ways an adult can assist children in their sex-role development.

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

UNIT 14. Development of Sex Roles

A. 1. The process by which adults help children gain an understanding of their masculine or feminine sex roles.

2. Rigid expectations or beliefs of the sex-role behaviors held by a group of people which may restrict the child's total development.

3. The blending of both masculine and feminine traits into one personality.

B. 1. d 3. c 5. a 7. d

2. b 4. c 6. a

3. c

C. Biological Factors; Social Conditioning; Imitation; Self-Socialization.

D. They restrict the range of behavior available to children.

(Little boys are not allowed to cry. Little girls must stay pretty and neat.)

They do not equip boys and girls for changing adult roles.

(Many men share the housekeeping role with women. Therefore, they must feel comfortable in the kitchen. Most women work, they must develop appropriate abilities to compete and achieve.)

They restrict personal fulfillment and may create mental stress.

(Girls are not supposed to compete with men. If they do compete they may feel unfeminine.)

E. Economic Changes; Views of Personal Fulfillment; Socialization Practices.

F. Any four of the following:

.Expose the child to a warm and nurturant adult-child relationship.

.Combine affection with dominance.

.Provide a male and female model.

.Expose children to experiences which develop the best of both masculine and feminine traits.

.Accept the child's biological sex.

.Provide clear, honest explanations to questions regarding human sexuality.

GLOSSARY

These words are used in this unit. Read over the words, with definitions, before going on. Think of how the words were used in the unit.

Androgyny - The blending of both masculine and feminine traits into one personality.

Cognitive - The process by which one learns; intellectual.

Conditioning - The process when a reward is given for the occurence of certain behaviors and these behaviors are strengthened and repeated as a result of the reward.

Cross-cultural - Comparisons made from one culture to another.

Freudian - Relating to the theory proposed by Sigmund Freud.

Identification - An internalization in the child of attitudes and patterns of behavior characteristic of her or his own sex.

Imitation - The learning of one's sex role by observing and copying the behaviors of a model.

Model - One who displays actions, attitudes, or behaviors which are reproduced or imitated by an observer.

Reinforcement - A reward for a particular behavior which increases the probability that the reinforced behavior will be repeated.

Sex-Role Stereotypes - Rigid expectations or beliefs of the sex-role behaviors held by a group of people which may restrict the child's development as a person.

Self-Socialization - The child's undertaking of what roles are acceptable for his sex and his conforming to these rules.

Sex Typing - The process by which parents and adults help children gain an understanding of their masculine or feminine sex roles.

Socialization - The learning of established rules and accepted forms of social behavior in a group or a culture.

Values - Those things in life which a person or a group of people consider most important.

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